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Bill takes aim at program that lets felons buy guns

Saturday, October 16, 2004

BY WILLIAM KLEINKNECHT
 Star-Ledger Staff

Sens. Jon Corzine and Frank Lautenberg (both D-N.J.) said yesterday they have proposed legislation aimed at dissolving a program that allows convicted felons to purchase guns if they obtain a federal waiver.

The senators said such a waiver has not been granted in the past 12 years because they have managed to cut off funding for the program, administered by the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

But they said the legislation that blocks the funding must be renewed every year and could eventually be defeated. They said the program angers gun-control advocates because the processing of each waiver costs \$10,000.

"We are spending \$10,000 of taxpayers' money to allow a felon to regain the right to bear arms," Corzine said as the senators announced the legislation at the Essex County Sheriff's Department in Newark.

According to the senators, the waiver authority was created to benefit Winchester firearms, which would have been prohibited from marketing guns because its parent company had been convicted of a felony related to the importation of pharmaceuticals.

Between 1981 and 1991, ATF processed more than 13,000 waiver applications and granted 5,600. Among the people granted waivers were people convicted of violent crimes, they said.

A study by the Violence Policy Center, a national gun-control group, found that

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some of the people who regained gun privileges later used weapons in crimes such as drug trafficking, sexual assault and grand larceny, the senators said.

Bryan Miller of Ceasefire New Jersey, a group that promotes gun control, said the public would be angry if it knew that the program existed, even without funding.

"If the citizens of this country knew there was a program to rearm convicted felons, they would rise up in protest," he said.

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